



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

MEDIA CONTACT:

nnlb.communications@gmail.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 26, 2024

Law and Order Committee Chair calls for urgent action on Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Crisis



Law and Order Committee Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton recently testified before a House Appropriations Subcommittee on the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People.

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Last week, at a critical hearing before the House Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee, Law and Order Committee Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton (ECN) shared a powerful testimony highlighting the urgent need for federal action to address the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP).

“We must stop pretending these cases are isolated, and we must stop allowing them to be swept under the rug,” Chair Charles-Newton stated, calling attention to the systemic failures that have left countless cases of missing and murdered Indigenous people unresolved. She highlighted jurisdictional challenges, communication breakdowns, and a severe lack of resources for law enforcement, all of which hinder efforts to bring justice to affected communities.

Chair Charles-Newton pointed to the 75 Navajo Nation members who are currently missing, with many cases left unsolved due to jurisdictional confusion and inadequate coordination between federal, state, and tribal law enforcement. She shared the case of Zachariah Shorty, a Navajo man who went missing in 2020. Despite being reported to local authorities in Farmington, New Mexico, the investigation was delayed as jurisdictional issues prevented Navajo Nation law enforcement from taking immediate action. By the time Navajo authorities could respond, Zach was found dead, and his murderer remains at large.

“This is just one example of how jurisdictional confusion and lack of resources leave families without answers,” Chair Charles-Newton said. “This must stop. We are doing everything we can with the limited resources we have, but we need Congress to act. The Navajo Nation alone spans over 27,000 square miles with a population of more than 250,000, and it is the largest Native American tribe in the U.S. We have the right to expect better protection from the federal government.”

Chair Charles-Newton’s testimony underscored alarming statistics shared by other lawmakers. Congressman Mike Simpson highlighted that more than two in five Native women experience rape in their lifetime, and that Native Americans represent 46 percent of all trafficking victims in the U.S. He also noted that 19 Native American people are reported missing for every 1,000 individuals, a staggering rate that calls for urgent federal intervention.

The 2013 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was a step toward addressing these issues, but as Charles-Newton and other advocates pointed out, significant challenges persist. Many cases are either declined or go unprosecuted, and perpetrators often face no accountability.

Advocates such as Abigail Echo Hawk and Cheryl Horne emphasized the need for more resources and better communication between law enforcement agencies, particularly in rural and urban areas where Indigenous communities are often neglected. “It’s not just about jurisdiction; it’s about accountability. Resources meant for our communities are not flowing as they should, and we are left to pick up the pieces,” Echo Hawk said.

Chair Charles-Newton concluded her testimony with a direct appeal to Congress, “Education and understanding are the first steps, but we must act. These cases can no longer be forgotten.”

She stressed that the federal government must take immediate responsibility to address the crisis and ensure justice for Indigenous victims.

Chairman Tom Cole (R-OK) wrapped up the hearing by emphasizing the need for bipartisan cooperation. “This is not a partisan issue; it’s a national issue,” Cole said. “The partnership of federal, state, and tribal leadership is essential if we are to make real progress in ending violence against Indigenous women and girls.”

###